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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to trace the historical and societal development of sex roles as related to women in today's society. Discussions include the role of the female in tribal societies, the development of monogamous marriage, and the societal influences which identify a woman primarily as a housewife and mother from the 16th-20th centuries. Careful consideration is given to the socialization of sex roles in children and how this relates to marriage expectations. The feminist movement is viewed as an attempt to equalize sex roles in education, sexuality, and the world of work. (Author/PC)

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# SEX ROLES IN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR:
# AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Dr. Donna Iven

This paper is an attempt to trace historical societal development as this relates to women and as it operates today to keep women an oppressed class. The paper demonstrates how this sex division is currently maintained through differential socialization by males and females.

To illustrate the continuing exploitation of women, recent statistics show that the economic position of women across job classifications today is worse than in 1955 when women earned 63.9% of men's salaries and women today continue to earn only 60% of men's salaries.[1] It is currently fashionable to compare the position of women with blacks in the U.S. and show that on the basis of stereotypes, both groups are hired last, fired first and hold the lowest paying and least prestigious jobs in the society; and having said this dismiss both problems as unsolvable. "The so-called 'black analogy' is no analogy at all; it is the same social process that is at work, a process which both justifies and helps perpetuate the exploitation of

one group of human beings by another. The nature of women, like that of slaves, is depicted as dependent, incapable of reasoned thought, childlike in its simplicity and warmth, martyred in the role of mother, and mystical in the role of sexual partner."[2] Both "problems" are solvable, but not without major social, legal, and economic changes in the society.

To facilitate understanding of this problem we can theoretically look at women as the proletariat and men the bourgeoisie where, "The proletarian condition is, in a nutshell, the lack of access to the means of production or means of subsistence which, in a society of generalized commodity production, forces the proletarian to sell his (or her) labor power. In exchange for this labor power he (she) receives a wage which then enables him (her) to acquire the means of consumption necessary for satisfying his (her) own needs and those of his (her) family."[3]

It becomes obvious then that in a society where women's labor power earns an average of only 60% of men's that she is destined not by biology but by economics to play socially acceptable sex

roles, and those roles defined for her by the power elite. How women came to occupy this inferior social position is of interest to feminists.

Tracing her existence back as far as recorded history, and then making some assumptions about social patterns previous to recorded history yields some interesting hypotheses. In looking at early social relationships the term "primal horde" is used extensively to describe the group or groups of humans who departed from the anthropoid world many millenia ago. "The maternal horde was the prototype of the maternal clan into which it subsequently developed. The chief distinction between the horde and the clan is that the horde stood alone, unaffiliated with any other horde. But once their members began to join together as affiliated groups of kin, they became clans. A network of clans comprised the phratries and tribes. Thus the earliest unit of society was not the father-family but the maternal horde which evolved into the maternal clan system and produced the matriarchal tribe at its apex of development."[4] The matriarchal tribe developed as a natural consequence of the division of labor of prehistoric

peoples."[5] Women's lives were centered in the community while the men went on hunting expeditions to secure food. It seems obvious that since the whole process of impregnation and fetal development was unknown that it was impossible for the concept of fatherhood to exist, meaning then that any children born of the women were children of the tribe. Also, since it was unlikely that birth control information was available, it seems logical that women were pregnant much of their adult lives. Following this line of argument, it seems reasonalble to assume that men in a nonpregnant state could run faster in hunting game, than pregnant women, which means that the early division of labor was logical for biological reasons also, but not the biological reasons usually posited. Had birth control information been available in prehistory, the "biological" reasons for the male to assume the provider role would have disappeared also. However, still today there is embedded in the folklore the idea that women produce nothing--know nothing--and are in essence parasites who have been historically important only in that they are necessary for the production

of children. Again, in the early division of labor women did develop community life and it is absurd to believe that they sat idle. Looking at only one of the prehistoric as well as contemporary woman's job, that of cooking, we find that "Cooking was only one technique which women acquired as the result of the discovery and control of fire and their mastery of directed heat. All the basic cooking techniques which followed upon the discovery of fire--broiling, boiling, roasting, baking, steaming, etc.--were developed by the women. These techniques involved a continuous experimentation with the properties of fire and directed heat. It was in this experimentation that women developed the techniques of preserving and conserving food for future use. Through the application of fire and heat, women dried and preserved both animal and vegetable food for future needs. Preparing, conserving and preserving food required the invention of all the necessary collateral equipment: containers, utensils, ovens, storage houses, etc. The need to protect the food in granaries from vermin resulted in the domestication of another animal--the cat. It was the

women, too, who separated out poisonous and injurious substances in foods. In the process, they often used directed heat to turn what was inedible in the natural state into a new food supply."[6]

But in addition to her culinary skills, woman was instrumental (and not as Parsons would claim--expressive) in the domestication of slow and small game, which provided a more reliable source of food than hunting. "So long as hunting was an indispensable full-time occupation, it relegated men to a backward existence. Hunting trips removed men for extended periods of time from the community centers and from participation in the higher forms of labor. The discovery of agriculture by the women, and their domestication of cattle and other large animals, brought about the emancipation of the men from their hunting life. Hunting was then reduced to a sport, and men were freed for education and training in the industrial and cultural life of the communities. Through the increase in food supplies, populations grew. Nomadic camp sites were transformed into settled village centers, later evolving into towns and cities."[7] "It was in and through this great work that women became

the first workers and farmers; the first scientists, doctors, architects, engineers; the first teachers and educators, nurses, artists, historians, and transmitters of social and cultural heritage."[8] How did it come to pass then that men took charge of not only life away from the community, but life in the community itself. The answer to this question lies in the fact that with the development of the domestication of animals and the development of agriculture, for the first time in history, surplus over and above the needs of the community was accumulated. With the accumulation of surplus came an entire shifting of the position of women and children in the society. How the surplus was expropriated from community control to individual control and profit is little understood as is the closing of access to education for women as further divisions of labor occurred during the industrial revolution. It is doubtful that the transition was peaceful.

Moving to anthropology for insight into how mother-right and community control of surplus shifted to father-right and individual control of surplus, available evidence indicates there were

several forms of group marriages and group families in the history of humankind. Engels, basing much of his evidence on Morgan, says, "In all forms of the group family it is uncertain who the father of a child is, but it is certain who the mother is. Although she calls all the children of the aggregate family her children and is charged with the duties of a mother towards them, she, nevertheless knows her natural children from the others. It is thus clear that, wherever group marriage exists, descent is traceable only on the maternal side, and thus the female line is recognized."[9]

As posited earlier, as economic conditions changed, changes in the structure of the family occurred, moving from group marriage to pairing marriage to monogamy. "Thus, as wealth increased, it, on the one hand, gave the man a more important status in the family than the woman, and, on the other hand, created a stimulus to utilize this strengthened position in order to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favor of his children. But this was impossible as long as descent according to mother-right prevailed. The

overthrow of mother-right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house also; the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. In order to guarantee the fidelity of the wife, that is, the paternity of the children, the woman is placed in the man's absolute power; if he kills her, he is but exercising his right."[10] Monogamy "... was not in any way the fruit of individual sex love, with which it had absolutely nothing in common, for the marriages remained marriages of convenience, as before. It was the first form of the family based not on natural but on economic conditions, namely, on the victory of private property over original, naturally developed, common ownership. The rule of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth--these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks as the exclusive aims of monogamy."[11] "Monogamy arose out of the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of one person--and that a man--and out of the desire to bequeath this wealth to this

man's children and to no one else's."[12] Thus "... the first class antagonism which appears in history, coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."[13]

Marriage and child rearing became the accepted ways for women to structure their time and earn their right to exist. Even during the early period of the industrial revolution education was something that took place in the family and consisted of teaching skills and morals.

During the Seventeenth Century distinctions between the sexes were made in laws, education, theology, and political and property rights. Midwifery was a monopoly women held until around 1765 when male medical educators became concerned "by the unskillful old women."

By the middle of the Eighteenth Century education began to be available to women but these schools were designed to prepare women for their roles as wives and mothers. Woman must help man to protect his wealth by becoming wise consumers

and intelligent mothers of his heirs. By the end of the Eighteenth Century the development of a market economy had begun to disrupt and transform the social relations of the family and by the first decades of the Nineteenth Century, as products formerly produced at home came to be accessible on the common market, the prestige of women's labor declined. The increasing expression of products as commodities, defined not by their use value but rather by their exchange value on the market, dichotomized those produced under market conditions by socially organized labor and those produced privately for direct use. Therefore, what work women did in the home was devalued because it had no exchange value. The appropriate woman's role changed again.

The ideal state for a Nineteenth Century woman then became idleness, expressed as gentility and developed into "The Cult of True Womanhood" with religious-like fervor. Women became living objects of art existing for the pleasure and pride of her man. She became a creature created for display. Her worth as an art object depended on her delicacy, frailty, purity and even asexuality.

She became a highly romanticized shell with an empty interior. Even her home became a showplace where her skills as a consumer could be displayed and her ability as a homemaker would be obvious to all, from her cleanliness standards to her gourmet meals involving hours of preparation.

By the Twentieth Century her role as a consumer was extremely important in an economy based on mass consumption. What women had once produced in their own homes they now purchased, such as food and clothing. The "Cult of True Womanhood" was carried easily into the Twentieth Century and amplified by the mass media, social scientists, and educators, particularly after World War II, in order to get women out of the factories and back into their homes to open up jobs for men. Social scientists, who during the war years were encouraging women to leave their children in day care centers in order to reap the benefits of association with peers, did an about face after the war when the tune was changed to "the irreversible psychological and social damage" done to children spending a significant portion of time away from

their mothers. Even breast and bottle feeding recommendations changed as changes were necessary in the economy. The needs of children remained the same. Well into the Twentieth Century women's primary role of housewife and mother continues to be accepted by the majority of the population. This definition of her role is perpetuated by the major institutions of our society; religion, education, economic, political-legal, mass media, and most importantly, the family and intensive socialization into acceptance of it. The patriarchal nuclear family is today the principal form of family life and is still the economic unit of society. The nuclear family, formed as a result of an intensive long term socialization process which teaches males and females separate sex roles, ensures in most cases the pairing off of a male and female into marriage, and the continuation of previously established patterns. Contrary to all of the "biological" based arguments about motherhood being natural and recurrent ramblings by psychologists such as Bruno Bettelheim who says that "we must start with the realization that, as much as women want to be good scientists or engi-

neers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers,"[14]

Harry Harlow[15] has shown that motherhood is not innate at all, but very much a learned process. In his studies of rhesus monkeys he shows that infant monkeys, isolated from their mothers at birth, cannot even copulate as adult monkeys, and when artificially inseminated, these unmothered mothers, tried to kill their babies at birth. This certainly contradicts the widely accepted notion that motherhood is instinctual. If motherhood were instinctual (an instinct being defined as an elaborate inborn pattern of behavior) then all members of the specie would exhibit "mothering" behavior. What Harlow shows is that motherhood, as well as some sexual patterning, is learned phenomena. If we carry this argument over to humans we can conclude that if "mothering" is instinctual the society would not have female child beaters and child abusers. However, we know that child abusers tend to have been children of abusing parents themselves, indicating again that child abusing is also learned behavior. Carrying this argument even further it is the writers con-

tention that most human behavior is learned, including that behavior associated with mating and dating processes. Marriages usually result from some form of dating process, and both males and females are effectively socialized into acceptance of some variation of the dating process with the playing of "appropriate" sex roles. Both males and females are socialized into and are usually willing to play the "game"--the "game" being defined as establishment of a relationship which includes sexual intercourse either inside of or outside marriage.

From earliest childhood she is given dolls--bride dolls, dolls that drink and wet so she learns how to change diapers, fashion dolls to fit her into the all important role of consumer. He is given erector sets, chemistry sets, etc.--toys designed to stimulate mental growth. In school she is encouraged to be sweet and passive and he to be active and involved. Girls and boys are separated in terms of many activities. Little boys are encouraged to play with other little boys and little girls with other little girls so that each becomes stigmatized as "tom boy" or "sissy"

if they try to play with the opposite sex. By adolescence the whole cult of manhood is well ingrained in boys, and girls start feeling pressures from parents and peers warning of the dangers of associating with boys. The teen years are associated with a variety of mixed feelings on the part of both sexes and they learn what is expected in appropriate dating behavior. She must let him initiate otherwise he'll take her aggressiveness as an open invitation for sexual intercourse. She's been taught to withhold sex and use it as a lever for getting that marriage certificate. He's been taught that he is only masculine if he has sexual intercourse with many girls. She's taught to look for the handsome guy whose future earnings look promising and to whom she can devote to him, and him alone, her whole life. He's taught to find the best looking girl who won't compete with him, and one whom he can possess since she, upon marriage, becomes his property, his private property. She's been taught to accept and in some cases desire a male who will possess her. She has been taught to be soft, childlike, passive, submissive, willing to live vicariously through the

males' experiences, and later on, to live through the lives of her children, never being her own person, and never aspiring to live her own life. If a couple rejects the idea of marriage right away and try a "living with" arrangement she plays the role of housewife in any case and says it is not for him, but it is because she loves to cook, clean, wash clothes, and do dishes. She can justify a sexual relationship with him because in her mind she expects he'll eventually marry her. He enjoys all the fruits of the "living with" arrangement with no strings attached. She knows that in order to raise her standard of living she must join forces with a man who is willing to share his income with her. She wants to be "kept" which often means in the home, because of the realization that even if she gets a college degree she will earn only as much as a man with a high school education. And this need to "... keep women in the home arises from two major aspects of the present system. The amount of unpaid labor performed by women is very large and very profitable to those who own the means of production. To pay women for their work, even at

minimum wage scales, would imply a massive redistribution of wealth."[16] In order to implement her search for the male who can afford to keep her, each woman must know what the male is looking for, in order for her to play her role, or be the kind of person he wants. To be what he wants usually means for her to be something other than she is--to fit his image of what she should be. His idea of the ideal mate is a child in a woman's disguise--someone to talk down to, someone who will give him undying loyalty and obedience. "What really counts is the fact that the ever-precarious self-respect of the average man causes him over and over again to choose a feminine type, which is infantile, nonmaternal and hysterical, and by so doing to expose each new generation to the influence of such women,"[17] thereby assuring a steady supply of such women in the future--women brainwashed by their socialization process. And as much as most males protest, including our colleagues, we must observe the women they actually married. "Even among young people, who now tend to marry while still in school, the old patterns begin imperceptibly to supplant the

new. Although they may start together, he winds up with a Ph.D., she with a "ph. T.," the consolatory degree for "putting hubby through." True, there is here a departure from the past. In this early stage, the wife, instead of earning her living through marriage, makes the marriage possible by earning both livings. An election has been made that the husband's career has priority; the bride becomes breadwinner so that he can stay with the books. No doubt the young woman's sacrifice (if it was that) was appreciated, but the division of labor begins to divide interest too. Routine work keeps her in a narrow channel, while he goes on to increasingly more complex levels of thought. In most cases, her career is eclipsed. The wife who puts her husband through, <u>winds up through</u>. By the time he acquires the significant degree and she is awarded the sop to her pride, the relationship of peers has been fractured. At this point, he takes up the earning responsibility as a professional, while her profession becomes marriage. Then, like their elders, these fresh young couples are left to make their way in two communi-

ties: the community of partners and the community of peers. Whirling in separate but not at all equal orbits, they may no longer be within hailing distance of one another."[18] Heterosexual women who reject this sex role stereotyping face incredible obstacles in the dating, mating process, regardless of whether the woman desires a "living with" arrangement or marriage. Because of the Women's Liberation Movement and the consciousness raising associated with it many women now are trying new ways of relating to men as well as to women. Unfortunately male consciousness raising for the most part is nonexistant, creating a situation where women are ready to reject the old ways and try new ones, but find there are very few males who can relate to liberated women who are also aggressive and who demand the right to live a life of their own. This situation evokes an attitude of contempt towards males on the part of many women's liberationists and encourages women to seek relationships with other "hip" women, a situation which gives rise to increasing disillusionment with men, and a concomitant willingness to experiment with lesbianism. For women

who cannot accept lesbianism, the mental trauma is extreme leading to much cynicism about establishing meaningful relationships with men at all. Having to play "games" with a male to try to establish a relationship with him sets the stage for continued role playing, which many women will no longer accept. If she does play the "game" she must wait for him to call. She must go where he wants to go on dates. She must accept his definition of the relationship. And she must accept his pattern of sexual behavior, another set of roles he plays, making the whole spectrum of life experiences, including the most intimate, male dominated. If he is the kind of male who believes his role in sexual intercourse is ejaculation, she is left feeling used and sexually unsatisfied. One woman reported that her new lover upon assuming the missionary position told her immediately after insertion of his penis "Don't move or I'll come." Women could develop a rating scale for male performance during sex play and sexual intercourse. If he plays the macho role of aggressor and immediately moves into the missionary position he could be rated as sexually unin-

formed and dull. Even if there is foreplay, and he then still moves into the missionary position, he might still be given a low rating. If the male engages in a great deal of sex play, encourages the women to assume the top position--usually the best position for women to achieve orgasm, restrains himself from ejaculation until she has had several orgasms, he could be given a top rating. Of course there could be many variations in between. Women could apply labels as men do, the latter an example of a "good lover" and the former an example of a "1, 2, 3, here I come man". But what good would rating scales or labels be if they didn't lead to changed behavior, and they can't lead to changed behavior unless men are secure enough about their own sexuality to be able to question themselves. Women who are lucky enough to establish a relationship with men of the "good lover" variety report feeling that they obtained as much from the sexual encounter as the male and don't see sexual intercourse as something "she does to satisfy him"--again acceptance of the stereotypical role of women even in sexual intercourse. Admittedly sex roles in

sexual behavior are undergoing rapid change, as some writers begin to write more about sexual satisfaction for both males and females and as the old double standard is eroded. As both males and females educate themselves about their own bodies, some of the sex role stereotyping must break down. Women who have been sexually satisfied will seek that kind of satisfaction again, and that may involve picking up the phone and asking a male for a date, frequentiug places where men congregate such as bars and dance halls, and buying him a drink or asking him to dance. But until women have, not only equal pay for equal work, but <u>access</u> in the first instance to <u>equal work</u> itself, these progressive changes will be slow to be accomplished. So long as females earn only 60% of males salaries, they can only be expected to carry 60% of 50% of the financial burden of dating and mating. Men who have found and know themselves, and who feel secure about their manhood, have much less difficulty dealing with "liberated women", and the changes these women want implemented. So long as the capitalistic system continues to profit from hiring one person

and getting the labor of two--the man, and the woman who does his housework at no cost to the society--it will be difficult for males and females to accept each other as persons first-concerned, cooperative, caring persons.

Engels has predicted for the future that "With the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether chey are born in wedlock or not. Thus, the anxiety about the 'consequences,' which is today the most important social factor--both moral and economic--that hinders a girl from giving herself freely to the man she loves, disappears. Will this not be cause enough for a graduel rise of more unrestrained sexual intercourse, and along with it, a more lenient public opinion regarding virginal honour and feminine shame?"[19] And perhaps with these changes the advent of uni sex roles instead of male and female sex roles.

## NOTES

[1]U.S. News and World Report (May 7, 1973), p. 98.

[2]Dixon, Marlene, Masculine/Feminine eds. Betty and Theodore Rozack (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 191.

[3]Mandel, Ernest, "Workers Under Neo-capitalism" paper delivered at Simon Fraser University. (Available through the Department of Political Science, Sociology, and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.D., Canada).

[4]Engels, Frederick, The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, introd. Evelyn Reed (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 18.

[5]For a more complete account of these processes see Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887) Swiss jurist and historian, Professor of Roman Law at Basle; and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) American scientist, ethnographer and historian of primitive society.

[6]Reed, Evelyn, Problems of Women's Liberation, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972, pp. 34-35.

[7]Ibid, p. 46.

[8]Ibid, p. 45.

[9]Engels, Frederick, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, (New York; Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 55.

[10]Ibid, pp. 67-69.

[11]Ibid, p. 74.

[12]Ibid, p. 83.

[13]Ibid, p. 75.

NOTES 2

[14]Bettelheim, Bruno, "The commitment required of a woman entering a scientific profession in present day American society." Woman and the Scientific Professions, The MIT symposium on American Women in Science and Engineering, 1965, in Naomi Weisstein, "Kinder, Kuche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female," Motive Nos. 6 and 7, (March/April, 1969), pp. 78-85.

[15]Harlow, Harry, "Hetereosexual Affectional Systems in Monkeys", American Psychologist, Vol. 17, (1962), pp. 1-9.

[16]Benston, Margaret, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation", Monthly Review, Vol. XXI, No. 4, (Sept. 1969).

[17]Horney, Karen, "The Death of Woman", International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. XIII, Part III, (1932) p. 359.

[18]Stone, I.F., "Marriage a la Mode," Womankind ed. Nancy Reeves, (Chicago, Ill.: Aldine-Atherton, 1971), p. 34.

[19]Engels, Frederick, The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 83.